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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000484

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [BM](#) [ASSK](#)

SUBJECT: ASSK GIVES PRESS A DOWNBEAT ASSESSMENT OF HER YEAR
OF FREEDOM

Classified By: COM CARMEN M. MARTINEZ FOR REASON 1.5(D).

11. (SBU) Summary: Aung San Suu Kyi told reporters and diplomats April 23 that her trips to various regions of the country reassured her that ethnic groups are anxious for national reconciliation. She provided details on how the trips had been marred by attempts to intimidate NLD supporters. ASSK also said there has been no progress on her dialogue with the SPDC and that relations have actually "digressed" somewhat. It is becoming clear, she said, that the SPDC is simply not interested in national reconciliation. She reiterated that basic NLD policies - on tourism, sanctions, investment assistance - will not change until there is real dialogue; however, the NLD stands ready to cooperate on humanitarian assistance. Publicly critical of the regime for the first time since her release, ASSK appeared to be ratcheting up the pressure, if only slightly, for the regime to act on commitments for political transition. End Summary.

One-year Assessment

12. (SBU) In a press conference on April 23 at NLD headquarters, Aung San Suu Kyi provided an assessment of events since her release from house detention almost one year ago, on May 6, 2002. She divided her remarks into two general themes: her travels around the country; and the status of NLD relations with the regime. Her travels, she said, had demonstrated that the ethnic groups continue to have a strong desire to work toward national reconciliation if given a chance to participate in a "true union" of Burma. She also cited examples, however, of how the trips have been marred by authorities harassing her party and intimidating people interested in seeing her. Photos of her recent visit to Chin State were on display showing, among other things, the large crowds that turned out and the six offices that she opened. Also shown were photos of large logs laid across the road to impede her progress by Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA) members and a group of USDA members who confronted her party on several occasions. ASSK said that it was obvious that the USDA and Ministry officials who visited Chin State to discourage people from turning out for her visit were under orders from Rangoon. She called on the SPDC to clarify the role of the USDA and explain why it has the power to take such actions if it is, as is claimed, only a social and welfare organization.

No Progress On Reconciliation

13. (SBU) ASSK said it was very disappointing that since her release last May, the SPDC has not made any attempts to move forward with discussions on national reconciliation. She said that her release was supposed to mark a shift from confidence building to more substantive exchanges including discussions on national reconciliation. Instead, relations have been static and the SPDC seems to want to avoid any motion towards national reconciliation. ASSK made the analogy of a child making excuses for not taking a bath; after a point it becomes clear that the child just does not want the bath. She said that, based on the SPDC's continued avoidance of discussions on national reconciliation the NLD has had to conclude that the regime is just not interested.

14. (SBU) ASSK honed in on the insincerity of the SPDC's claims that it wants national reconciliation by noting that there has been no mention of the NLD or the SPDC's actions towards the party in the local media. The regime's comments on reconciliation are always directed at the international press and diplomats, she claimed, indicating that the comments are intended only to mitigate international criticism. She called on the SPDC to explain why it has never published any reports on confidence building, her trips, or national reconciliation, in the local press.

15. (SBU) ASSK also took the SPDC to task for its poor treatment of UN Special Envoy Razali, noting that if the authorities were serious about achieving reconciliation they would not restrict his travel to or activities within Burma. Specifically, ASSK said the SPDC should not have blocked Razali from visiting her in Taunggyi (Shan State) in November 2002 or delayed his visits to the country, as they are

reportedly currently doing.

Policies Will Not Change Without Dialogue; Offer Stands For Cooperation On Assistance

16. (SBU) ASSK reiterated that with no dialogue on national reconciliation, the NLD will not change its basic policies on tourism, investment, sanctions, and assistance. She noted that the NLD has continued to make it known that it would like to cooperate with the SPDC on humanitarian assistance projects but, even on high visibility problems such as HIV/AIDS, the authorities have indicated "they are not interested in working together."

17. (SBU) In response to a question from an Australian reporter (ABC) on the Australian government's decision to move toward engagement with the SPDC while the EU and U.S. appear to be heading toward tighter sanctions, ASSK said she had clearly communicated her disappointment to the Australian government on its shift in policy. She said the SPDC needs to be reminded that maintaining the status quo is not possible, change is inevitable and they should not attempt to block it (noting that as Buddhists they should know and accept this).

18. (C) Comment: This was a more confrontational approach from ASSK than we have seen since confidential talks began in October 2000. The lack of progress on dialogue one year after her release from house detention, coupled with continued and perhaps more systematic harassment on her trips around the country, apparently prompted a slight shift in strategy. Still, she was somewhat cautious in her remarks and reiterated several times that there are no personal animosities between her and the SPDC and that she wants to work together for national reconciliation. She appeared to be ratcheting up the pressure, albeit only slightly, for the regime to act on previous commitments for political transition. We expect the regime will respond shortly with a press conference of its own. End Comment.
Martinez